



The Family Circle.

"Home, Sweet Home."

A REPORTER'S ROMANCE.

I.

Walter Condon and I—reporters for two morning newspapers in the city of New York—were nearing the end of our long round of visiting police stations in search of news, as the clocks were making ready to strike twelve. Turning out of Pearl Street, where the bitter wind of this January midnight was driving fine icy snow into our chilled faces, the green signal lantern before the door of our last station showed us a hospital ambulance standing there. Hastening to enter we found, lying on the floor of the back office, with an ugly wound in his head, a man whose face we had often seen in the cells for thieving, and whose business was to peddle sweetmeats among the concert saloons and sailors' resorts existing in such terrible abundance between Chatham Street and the East River. The surgeon thought the man would not live, but ordered him removed to a hospital. At that moment the front door was opened timidly, and a small voice asked: "Please, sir, is he dead?"

"No, he ain't croaked yet, but he will 'fore long," answered the glum door-man. Then, seeing the scared, pitiful little face, he added, more kindly, "What do you want with old Baldwin, anyhow?"

"I don't know, sir. He was my uncle, and Big-nosed Jim told me he was killed." And she began to cry.

Now there was something so uncommonly friendless in the appearance of this ragged, bare-headed little girl crying silently by the door, not offering to come near the unconscious man, nor wailing loudly, as is the custom of street children in trouble, and something so pathetic in her soft voice, that we began to question her, but had got no farther than to find out that her name was Elsie, and that she had lived with Baldwin for a long time, but she thought not always, for she remembered playing with a beautiful young lady in a fine house "where it us allers warm, you bet," she exclaimed, spreading her blue hands out before the great coal stove, when the door opened again, and a policeman pushed in before him an old hag, blue-eyed, half dressed, and furious with anger. At the sight of her the little waif broke her story short off, and crept tremblingly over to the farthest corner, begging us pitifully not to let the woman take her.

"Arrah!" shrieked the beldam. "Jist let me git a hold on yez wrist, and I'll—"

But her throat was lost as she was hurried back to her stone bedroom. Then the dying old sinner was carried to the ambulance, and it rattled off to the relief hospital, where Baldwin's name was entered upon the death-roll before another sunset.

Meanwhile Condon was trying to comfort the girl. Elsie told him about a long journey, and that afterward Baldwin had made her go about with him at night and sing in the saloons, had forced her to beg for nearly all her food and for the rags she called clothes, and to pick over the ashes in street barrels for gleanings of coal to burn in the broken stove that warmed his garret. Elsie explained her terror in the presence of the woman by saying that Baldwin had sometimes left her in the beldam's charge, when she had been beaten shamefully. Condon always thought this woman could have told him more about Elsie, but not feeling it strongly at the time, he never afterward was able to discover her.

The story Walter won from the little stranger touched him deeply, used as he was—and as we all come to be—to the woes of the poor in the metropolis; and most of all when, her confidence fully won, she said, simply, "I'll sing for you," and began a pretty melody, while we all listened to the sweet tones so strange in a police office; then, I think, his mind must have been decided, for when the bluff sergeant called out, "Well, what shall I do with the kid?" Condon's answer was quick, "I'll take care of her."

"To-night, Tom," he explained to me, "I think she had better go to a hotel, and to-morrow I'll take her home."

"And a fine time you'll have of it!" was my thought; but I said, "Oh, certainly," so off we went to a small German hotel we knew of, and put the little waif to bed.

Walter lived up in the Eighth Ward, with an aunt, who was a good old soul, but had rather more acidity mixed with her affection than any of us liked. It was a snug little home though, and the young man had good reasons to suppose he would succeed to its ownership.

I did not see Condon until the following evening at the Press Club, and I was very anxious to know how he felt about his generous act, after sleeping on it, and moreover, how he had introduced his ward to his aunt. I rather expected the complete disappointment of my enthusiastic friend's plans. He told me all about it at once. Elsie had been rather distrustful of him in the morning, but took a childish delight in the new clothes he had bought for her.

"She only needed some color in her cheeks," he averred, warmly, "to make her a positively pretty girl. But her comfortless look was an advantage in one respect, for it softened a little the muscular heart of that excellent old aunt of mine, and I believe Elsie will really win her. By jove! I hope so."

Elsie did win her, and although at first her ignorance and street manners annoyed the old lady a great deal, she was partly coaxed and partly forced to be patient with the girl, and Elsie rapidly refined.

II

Not long after this I left New York and went to California for five years. I could tell you some stories about that too, if I had time; but no matter. I kept up a sort of connection with the newspapers through correspondence, and therefore

when my property in San Francisco was burned, and I came back as poverty stricken as ever, I had little difficulty in finding a position on the press, and was fortunate enough to get into the same office with my old time chum.

Condon had hardly changed his status. He was the regular Wall Street reporter now, and on a salary, but spent most of his energy in writing critical essays and in the study of political economy. For politics, in the abstract, he had a profound admiration; for ward caucuses, party machinery, and Congressional wranglings an intense disgust. He therefore might have occupied a far more prominent place in metropolitan journalism if he had not persistently chosen to keep this position, which suited him and favored his pet study. He seemed indifferent and indolent, and was so in many respects, for he loved quiet and his mood; yet when an emergency rose, he could summon tremendous activity. He carried about with him always much latent power.

Changes in his affairs contributed to this gentlemanly and studious neglect of stirring work. The death of his aunt left him with the little house in which they had lived and a comfortable income, and a staid old lady became his housekeeper.

As for Elsie, she had become the pet of the household, and Walter always spoke of her as his little sister. His aunt left a special bequest providing for her education, and she was happy at the boarding school up the Hudson.

So affairs went on. The purity of our September climate faded into sere October, and chilling airs bore premonition of winter. One day we were all in the office, awaiting assignments for the afternoon, when the hall boy brought in a visitor card. The editor glanced at it, grumbling at a visitor interruption, and tossed it toward Walter, calling out, "Go see what she wants, Condon."

Walter growled some anathemas on the head of the whole female sex—I think we were all in bad humor that morning—and took the card. I saw it.

Miss Hilda Brand,

written in a firm, upright, feminine hand, with no waste of ink in flourishes. Rising indolently, he sauntered out to the anteroom, leaving the door ajar, and thus permitting a glimpse of the lady—a rather young and slender woman, with a sweet and serious face, no dimples nor long eyelashes, but a clear complexion, gray eyes full of purity and earnestness, and thin lips expressing self-reliance and strength. She was very plainly attired in dark clothing, and her simple hat was concealed in the folds of a veil.

Condon bowed in the attitude of sincere respect he held for women—an attention to their every word that had captivated many a one by its subtle flattery—and asked how he could serve her in place of Mr. Bruenell, whose excuses he presented.

"Thank you," she replied; "I am seeking employment as a stenographer. I have had experience in taking the proceedings of Congressional committees at Washington, and hope to be able to avail myself of newspaper work here. I can refer—"

"It's not necessary," Walter interrupted. "Reporting for us is a question of present ability rather than of antecedents." He was looking at her sharply, and I thought I saw her lip tremble at his austere and business like manner. Perhaps he saw it too, for he added, more kindly, "we have never made use of any feminine skill, but if you will wait a moment, I will consult with Mr. Bruenell."

It was soon understood among us that the fair stenographer was to be a member of the staff. She came, and did her work well. We readily got acquainted with her, but could never be familiar at all, and I believe that men generally disliked her. She was rather too mysterious to please us. Condon seemed to pay less attention to her than any one else; but one dark night when she had been kept until ten o'clock, and it had come on to rain, Condon remarked; "I will give you the shelter of my umbrella to the car, Miss Brand," and went in spite of her protest—a piece of solid audacity three reporters I knew of had ignominiously failed in within a fortnight.

Condon had a way of quietly taking possession of every lady he chose to speak to, as though he knew precisely what they wanted to do and ought to do far better than they did themselves; and this firm, quiet, polite persistence they generally found irresistible, knowing he would not be irritated by a rebuff.

One day there was to be an important inquest at Newark upon the cause of a fatal boiler explosion some days previous, and Miss Brand was sent down to take a short-hand report of the proceedings. She was expected to return between nine and ten o'clock in the evening. It was the 17th of March, and a cold, snowy day—the ugliest end of winter. After our early evening dinner Condon went over to Jersey City on an errand, and returning about nine o'clock, heard at Cortlandt Street that a railway train had fallen through a bridge on the Meadows. He glanced at his watch. "It's her train," he said to himself, with a chill feeling about the heart, and, hastened by impulse rather than controlled by purpose, he ran across to the next wharf and leaped upon a boat just leaving the slip.

Now he had time to think. The night was cold, and the icy wind from down the bay swept before it snow and sleet, which rattled on the roof of the cabin, and slammed the doors with changing gusts. The storm was dense as a fog, and Condon found himself chafing with a nervous haste quite unusual to him, as the ferry boat stopped again and again in the ice, whistling her hoarse warning. He went out on deck and peered into the murky night, but got little consolation. Vexed with himself for feeling so much concern, it never occurred to him that ordinary humanity would require him to go on such an errand as this; that the fraternal interest of journalistic association would demand that he do what service he could to a sister reporter. He only saw possible harm to her individually. He called her "Hilda" in his thought, and not "Miss Brand," as always hitherto.

An engine and some cars were waiting to take the surgeons down to the wreck, and upon representing himself to be a reporter, Walter received a grudging permission to go also. The short ride ended, Condon was the first to alight and hurry toward a fire built by the ruined bridge, for there was no shelter near except a single overcrowded coach. He scanned the group of fingers around the blaze. Miss Brand was not among them. Trembling with excitement, he caught a brakeman's arm, and hurriedly described her.

"She's all O K, Sir!—not a scratch—I know her—just tarter to the city down the track—couldn't hold her—"

Condon waited to hear no more, but started to follow her. The track was rough and slippery, the snow was changing into steady snow, and the darkness was intense, but he stumbled on with all speed, and presently thought he saw some one ahead. He hallooed, but the wind drowned his voice, and he seemed to gain nothing upon the figure, until suddenly it disappeared, and the next instant, so deceiving was distance in the snow, a woman rose up from almost under his feet.

"Hilda!" he exclaimed.

"Who is it? Mr. Condon? Oh, I am so glad!"

"Are you hurt?" was his anxious question.

"No," she said, "but very tired," and she clung to his arm, her form shaking with fatigue and excitement and cold. His overcoat was off in an instant, and wrapped around her. Then he supported her firmly, and started on, for she would not go back.

"There are no roads on these meadows," he said. "We must walk back all the way to the ferry, for it will not do to stand still in this storm. Can you endure four miles of this?"

"With your help, I think so," she replied; and they struggled on. Suddenly stopped. "Your report, Mr. Condon! What will you write? You must go back."

He stopped also, but to find his unwieldy ulster more closely about her slight, thinly clad form.

"I did not come for news. I came for you."

She only held more tightly to his arm, murmuring, "I was pretty badly frightened," and walked on. Not far, however, for that moment they descried the relief train returning to the city, with the wounded, and, managing to make the engineer hear their cries, were taken on board.

(To be continued.)

Frankness and Reserve.

It is curious with what avidity we form impressions of others, how frequently we treat others coldly by reason of hastily formed and arbitrary opinions originally conceived by them; how our imperfect knowledge of partial acquaintances causes us often to misunderstand and fail to appreciate them.

Primary opinions formed of others are seldom abandoned, never entirely obliterated. Some people always produce a favorable impression; others invariably leave something to be desired in them. The manners of some are easy and affable, they bow courteously, smile pleasantly, speak cheerily; a warmth and glow pervades them, which extends to others, and they throw a life and vigor into their words and acts that never fails to attract. They enter warmly into our projects, speak on topics of interest to us, adapt themselves immediately to every subject of discussion, and render themselves uniformly agreeable.

This geniality of manner and bearing renders domestic life enjoyable, and adds zest to every social enjoyment; it makes the household, as well as the ball-room, resound with hearty laughter and enjoyments; makes happy many a home, and fragrant with pleasant memories many an otherwise dreary hour. It cools the heated brow of thoughts, dries up the turbid stream of melancholy, washes away the hundreds of daily aggravations, and furnishes relief to the worried soul.

This spontaneity is found everywhere—among the rich and poor, old and young, thoughtful and otherwise. It creates the urbanity of the statesman, the influence of the popular leader, the suavity of the diplomat, the inspiration of the author, and the courtesy of the true gentleman. It is the most positive adornment of domestic life, and the surest guarantee of a pleasant home. In women it is the most remarkable, rendering their manners charming, their devotion spontaneous, and their conversation rapid, brilliant and vivacious. It has the most influence in rendering them ever welcome and beloved. Could all but estimate so valuable an acquisition, none would disregard it, and our daily enjoyments would be greatly augmented and increased thereby.

JOSE BILLINGS ON MARRIAGE.—By awl means Joe get married, if you have a fair show. Don't stand shivering on the bank, but pitch rite in and stick your head under and shiver it out. There ain't any more trick in getting married tharen the is in eating peanuts. Many a man has stood shivering on the shore until the river run out. Don't expect to marry an angel, they have been all picked up long ago. Remember Joe, you hain't a saint yourself. Do not marry for beauty exclusively; beauty is like ice, awfully slippery and thaws dreadfully easy. Don't marry for luv neither; luv is like a cooking stove, good for nothing when the fuel gives out. But let the mixture be some beauty, becomingly dressed, with about two hundred and fifty dollars in her pocket, a gud speller, handy and neat in the house, plenty of good sense, tuff constitution and by-laws, small feet, a light step; add to this sound teeth and a warm heart. The mixture will keep in any climate and will not evaporate. Don't marry for pedigree unless it's backed by bank-notes. A family with nothing but pedigree generally lacks sense.